



# SC FreshXpress

*a publication of the*

**SC Fruit, Vegetable, & Specialty Crop Association**

**January, 2008**

## **SC Fruit, Vegetable, and Specialty Crop Association**

The SC Fruit, Vegetable, and Specialty Crop Association (SCFVSCA) supports promotional, research, and educational efforts for improving the marketing and quality of production of fresh fruit, vegetable, and specialty crops grown in South Carolina. The Association works with any and all grower groups, government agencies, public universities, elected officials, and other public and private organizations or businesses to promote the best interest of fresh fruit, vegetable and specialty crops in South Carolina from production to consumption.

### **Election of Board of Directors**

The members recently elected the following to the Association's Board of Directors:

Stephen Still - *President* for the years 2008 and 2009

Chris Rawl - *Vice President* for the years 2008 and 2009

Johnny McNair - *Secretary* for the years 2008 and 2009

David Richburg - *Treasurer* re-elected for the years 2008 and 2009

*District 1* Billy Ledford, reelected to another two-year term to represent the farmers in Abbeville, Anderson, Cherokee, Chester, Chesterfield, Greenville, Greenwood, Lancaster, Laurens, Oconee, Pickens, Spartanburg, Union and York Counties.

*District 2* Charles Wingard, elected to a two-year term to represent the farmers in Aiken, Calhoun, Edgefield, Fairfield, Kershaw, Lexington, McCormick, Newberry, Orangeburg, Richland, Saluda and Sumter Counties.

*District 3* Johnny McNair, elected to a two-year term to represent the farmers in Berkeley, Clarendon, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Georgetown, Horry, Lee, Marion, Marlboro and Williamsburg Counties.

*District 4* Oliver Freeman, elected to a two-year term to represent the farmers in Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Beaufort, Charleston, Colleton, Dorchester, Hampton and Jasper Counties.

### **Committees Established**

#### **Research Committee**

In order to assess the need for research on the production and harvesting of fruits and vegetables in South Carolina, the Association members formed a Research Committee. President Sidney Livingston appointed Dickie Kirby of Timmonsville to serve as chairman of the committee with Powell Smith as the Advisor. Dickie is enlisting at least two additional members to serve with him on the committee. Members interested in serving on the Research Committee should call Dickie at 843-346-3931.

#### **2008 EXPO Committee**

Incoming President, Stephen Still, was asked to appoint an Association member to chair the 2008 EXPO Committee. Russell Duncan and Bruce Johnson have agreed to contact other county agents to begin the dialogue to secure some items for the 2008 EXPO auction as a part of our fund raising efforts.

## 22nd Annual Southeast Fruit & Vegetable EXPO

The 22nd Annual Southeast Fruit & Vegetable EXPO at the Myrtle Beach Convention Center is the largest educational event and display of equipment for fruits and vegetables production in the two Carolinas. This year's attendance was larger than last year and there were more exhibitors.

The opening day ceremony began with the welcome to South Carolina by the SC Fruit, Vegetable & Specialty Crop Association President, Sidney Livingston. Thomas Mack, Vice President for Technical Services at Dole Foods delivered the keynote address. The thrust of Mack's presentation was food safety and what his company is doing to insure a safe supply of foods for its customers. He also talked about Dole's need to source many of its products in the past and its plans for continuing to source in the future. Dole currently has two plants on the West Coast and two on the East Coast with its newest plant opening in Bessemer City, NC, in 2007 - a potential opportunity for South Carolina produce farmers.

The EXPO provided an opportunity and some time for the members to reflect on a year that has been filled with unexpected challenges and share experiences with their fellow farmers from both North and South Carolina. More importantly, it provided an opportunity for members to learn about some of the latest research that has been done to enhance the production and marketing of fruits and vegetables in South Carolina.

### Society of Saint Andrew Looking for Fields to Glean

The Society of Saint Andrew is asking South Carolina farmers for permission to glean their fields after they have decided that it is uneconomical to continue harvesting the fruits, vegetables and potatoes, etc.

The Society of Saint Andrew is a Christian ministry dedicated to gleaning America's fields and feeding America's hungry by providing healthy, nutritious produce. The Society's mission involves three programs: the **Gleaning Network**, **Potato Project**, and **Harvest of Hope**.

For more information, call Marilyn Marks, Society of Saint Andrew, 704-553-1730, visit [www.endhunger.org](http://www.endhunger.org), or call Fred Broughton at 803-734-2224.

### Downy Mildew on Greens

Anthony Keinath, Vegetable Pathologist, Clemson University

Eating collards on New Year's Day means you'll have plenty of money in the New Year. Hopefully, this saying is true for collard growers as well-unless the collards have downy mildew. When I was buying collards to cook for New Year's Day, I found plenty of collard bunches with downy mildew in the grocery store in Charleston.

Downy mildew on greens, spring cabbage, and other cole crops can be a problem whenever temperatures are moderately warm from fall through spring. Drizzling rain and fog provide ideal weather conditions for downy mildew.

Collards are susceptible no matter how old they are. Symptoms start on the oldest leaves as pale yellow or tan spots, often with black stippling or specks. The black specks also are visible on the underside of the leaf.

The downy mildew fungus makes its spores on the bottom side of leaves. Spores and fungus growth is visible in the morning before the dew dries. The spores are clear or white and are spread by wind from plant to plant or field to field. The fungus survives between crops in the remains of diseased plants.

Several fungicides can be used against downy mildew. Aliette, Quadris, Cabrio, and ProPhyt are registered on collard and other leafy greens. Quadris and Cabrio are very similar fungicides and must not be used together to prevent resistance in the downy mildew fungus. All fungicides work best when sprays start before disease appears in a field. For fields already affected, rotate Quadris or Cabrio with ProPhyt, which is available from Helena.

These four fungicides plus others are registered on cabbage and broccoli. See the Southeastern U.S. Vegetable Crop Handbook for a rating of which fungicides are most effective.

### Marketing Opportunities . . .



Direct marketing provides additional opportunities for many of the smaller farmers who do not have on-farm storage and cooling facilities.

All of the SC Fruit, Vegetable, and Specialty Crop Association members are challenged to capitalize on the Farmers Market Nutrition Programs and the Food Stamp Program at the community-based farmers markets in the state.

More than 70 community-based farmers markets are open for business in South Carolina and all of them are constantly recruiting additional farmers. The demand for locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables is creating positive marketing opportunities for direct marketers. Under some circumstances farmers with roadside markets are also permitted to participate in these programs.

For more information, contact Fred Broughton 803-734-2224 or Yolanda Kennedy 803-898-0340.

## Marketing Your Products in a Competitive Marketplace

Martin Eubanks  
Director of Marketing  
South Carolina Department of Agriculture

Today's consumers are smart and informed. They are constantly bombarded by advertisements telling them about the biggest and best items in the marketplace, all at a "deal", and all vying for consumer purchasing dollars. So how is a farmer suppose to compete when it is time to market fruit and vegetable crops, sometimes in small volume, and sometimes against industry giants at retail?

I believe that it is important to first know your customer. Who is it you wish to reach? There are many options out there from large food retailers, to u-pick alternatives, to local farmers markets, with many other options in between.

A term I heard expressed many years ago at a direct marketing meeting was referred to as the "Marketing Concept". Quite simply, it stated that one must first determine the needs and wants of the target audience (the consumer/customer) and focus your business efforts to meet those needs and wants, and to do it better than your competition. I have always felt that statement summed up marketing of agricultural products pretty well and that it is relative to producers of all sizes.

So who is your customer? If you are geared towards direct sales via a roadside market or at local community based markets, it will be completely different than if you wish to sell wholesale to the larger food wholesale and retail community. So it is first important to determine your niche and then gear your marketing efforts accordingly.

How large is your operation? How much volume can you consistently produce? Are you set up to grade and package product in a facility that meets the Food Safety demands of larger outlets? Do you carry product liability insurance? Can you readily adjust your product mix to meet changing demand? What can I offer a customer that he or she can't find elsewhere? These are just a few of the questions one must ask when determining your market.

Once you have determined your market niche, then it is time to determine the needs and wants of the customer. Are they seeking a large variety of product? Do they want different types of packaging? Is a local grower important to them? Are they seeking heirloom varieties they can't find in a store? Is organic important or do they just want it local? The questions will vary, but the principles do not...you must know your customer and what you can offer to meet their needs and wants. Consumers have many choices of where to shop, and you want to be that choice. You do this by creating value for the consumer and by giving them a reason to choose you.

There are many ways to figure this out. What is selling well at your local market? Are certain customers always asking about a particular variety or something to add to the product mix? Do you have a customer list and send out weekly newsletters or electronic messages letting them know what is available? Do you sample product and have a knowledgeable staff to communicate with customers when they have questions? Have you ever polled your customer base to inquire about new things you might like to grow or to find out what they might be looking for in the market place?

***“Once you get their attention then it is up to you to provide a quality experience with customer value so they will come back again and again.”***

(Marketing Your Products, Continued, page 4)

## Methyl Bromide for 2008

Powell Smith  
Clemson Extension Service  
Lexington County

As you all know, the use of methyl bromide for soil fumigation is gradually being phased out. Each year a document (Critical Use Exemption) requesting the use of methyl bromide for fumigation in crops where no adequate alternatives are available is prepared and presented to EPA. Each year the amount of methyl bromide authorized becomes less and less even for these critical uses.

The request for 2008 has been approved; however, the level of methyl bromide available for use is almost 88% less than the amount being used in 1991, which is what the Montreal Protocol agreement was about.

The agreement has worked well for reducing the use of methyl bromide to protect the ozone layer and, because of the critical use exemptions, has provided enough methyl bromide for critical agricultural uses. We do, though, need to be as efficient as possible in using our dwindling supply of the fumigant.

A new type of mulch film, called 'Virtually Impermeable Film' (VIF) allows lower rates of fumigant to give the same results. A great body of research in the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida has shown that the rates of methyl bromide, methyl iodide (Midas®), Telone® products, and other fumigants can be reduced by up to 50% without sacrificing efficacy of the fumigant.

A word of caution, though, if you have a serious nut sedge problem, close to a full rate may be needed for these weeds.

You may want to consider using VIF to reduce the cost of fumigation and help 'stretch' our shrinking methyl bromide supply. More information about using VIF can be gotten from mulch-film suppliers, crop consultants, or your extension agent.



## ***Marketing Your Products . . . continued***

Take advantage of your strengths and don't be afraid to try any tactic to get the customers attention. Once you get their attention then it is up to you to provide a quality experience with customer value so they will come back again and again...*Build Repeat Business.*

Doing it better than the competition is relative. Consumers can go into any retail outlet today and have several hundred items from around the world to choose from in the produce aisle. That retailer is trying innovative tactics to keep that customers business. If you are his supplier, he is looking to you to provide quality product, to offer great delivery service, and quite possibly to provide several different product formats from bulk filled to clam shells to provide variety and value to his customer. What are you doing for the retailer that your competition from

Anywhere USA is not providing? Provide him with value!



If you are competing at a roadside market, farmers market, or at a local market, you should be asking yourself what you can do to differentiate yourself from your neighbor and from the local retailer. You have to provide customers with value so they will make a decision to come to your place of business. Perhaps it is the "on-farm experience" or a perception of fresher product. Some consumers just want to be able to talk to the person that grew the food they are about to eat. In short, determine your strengths and play up those strengths and always be talking to your customers to find out what you are doing right and to look for new opportunities. Be proud of what you do and talk about it. Customers will notice and will again find value in the services and

products you provide.

The South Carolina Department of Agriculture is also providing opportunities to better promote your locally grown products through the Certified South Carolina branding effort. By becoming a member you have access to point of purchase materials and to the trademarked logo. You also become a part of the member data base that is promoted through a web-site, the *Market Bulletin*, and through other venues. How will this help?

The SCDA has developed a comprehensive promotional program based on consumer research. The promotional tag line and music, television commercials, radio spots, billboards, and point of purchase materials all reinforce the Certified SC Grown logo. Much money has been spent to ask South Carolina citizens to support South Carolina products. Growers are encouraged to use the logo on product packaging, on PLU stickers, on farm signs, and anywhere else that a consumer will immediately recognize your product as a product of South Carolina.

The branding effort is catching the attention of consumers. Research shows that consumers are looking for the logo in the marketplace and that it can make a difference when they make their final purchasing decision. These programs work and again provide a value to the consumer. By using the logo to identify your products you are capitalizing on a major promotional effort.

It is vital that we help South Carolina consumers make informed decisions to purchase local products when available. They have told us they want local products but that they can't always identify them where they shop. There is the opportunity for retailers and local growers to reach the consumer with the local message. We are encouraging use of the logo at retail through signage, promotions, and in weekly advertisements that feature South Carolina products. We also encourage member growers to use the logo on product that will be marketed through retail. If you are selling locally, then use certified signage at your market or while at the community based market so that customers will make the connection between what they see and hear and your products.

Fruit and vegetable marketing can be frustrating, but it can also be fun. Take advantage of all of the tools that are available to you to promote your farm and your products. It all comes down to knowing the needs and wants of your customer and meeting those needs and wants, and doing it better than your competition.

Have a great season and call on the staff of the SCDA anytime we can be of assistance in your marketing efforts.

**Buy South Carolina. Nothing's Fresher. Nothing's Finer.**

For more information about the Certified SC program, contact

Ansley Rast, Program Coordinator  
803-734-2200  
arast@scda.sc.gov.

## **Research Update 2008**

Dr. Richard L. Hassell

Clemson University - Coastal Research and Education Center, Charleston

### **Research Projects**

#### **1. "B" size potato production**

This is the fourth year for this study. We are working with three potato breeders throughout the country to select potato cultivars that produce only small (under 2 inches in dia.) tubers in a high population setting. We are planting them using plastic culture with double rows, 16 inches apart between rows and 8 inches between plants. The plastic strips are on 6 foot centers with one drip line down the center of each bed. Our research has shown that white plastic with a black backing works the best. The plastic is put down in the fall and then the seed is planted mid February. Harvesting takes place in late May to early June. During this period there is little insect or disease pressure. We are test marketing these in the Charleston area with the chiefs. We are looking for cultivars that are different in flesh color as well as skin color. The more different the potato the more in demand it seems to be. If you are interested in trying this crop out and have questions give me a call.

#### **2. Sweet Corn**

This is an on-going project to evaluate new cultivars. This past year we examined only the sh2 types. We looked at 10 yellows, 9 bi-colors, 6 white. We were looking at the new types. They go by many names but when looking in a seed catalog they go by Xtra Tender series or the Mirai series. These types last a long time on the shelf and have a normal to creamy texture. If you are a sweet corn grower and would like a copy of our results you need to contact me.

#### **3. Watermelon Grafting**

We are looking at grafting watermelons on to root stocks that contain resistance to soil borne diseases. This is a common practice in other parts of the world but so far not in this country. This is mainly due to our ability to rotate or use chemicals. Both of these practices are becoming harder to follow so this method has become one that has started to become worth looking at. We realize that labor and cost of transplant are two of the biggest concerns and we are looking into methods that will address both of these issues. We are also looking at both root stocks as well as watermelon cultivars that are used for grafting in hopes of finding additional advantages for using grafted plants. One thing that we have found, besides the soil borne resistance, is that the fruit from grafted plants have a much firmer flesh than those that are not grafted. This seems to be of interest to those in the fresh cut area. We will again be having a field day this spring to demonstrate grafting.

## **White Mold on Vegetable Brassicas**

Anthony Keinath, Vegetable Pathologist, Clemson University

In December 2006 and January 2007, white mold was found on a variety of vegetable brassica crops (collard, broccoli, and mustard). The recent heavy rains and moderately warm temperatures are a warning that white mold may appear again in 2008.

Older plants are more susceptible than younger plants. Plant injury, either by mechanical damage or freezing, makes an easy entry point for the fungus. White mold starts as a soft, wet rot at the base of the plant or on the edges of outer leaves. The rotted area enlarges quickly, giving this disease the common name of "watery soft rot."

White mold is difficult to control. It shows up relatively quickly, so many growers do not spray for it. Once a plant is infected, white mold cannot be stopped. It is also difficult to eradicate the fungus from infested soil.

Recommended control measures include:

- Plow soil to bury sclerotia that are in the upper soil layer so they cannot produce airborne spores.
- Rotate infested fields to non-host crops in the grass family, such as small grains and corn. Among the most susceptible crops grown in South Carolina are green bean, peanut, soybean, sunflower, cabbage, collard, Irish potato, and tomato. The 2007 outbreaks of white mold were in fields cropped recently to soybean, peanut, and cole crops.
- Eliminate weeds that are hosts, such as Carolina geranium, chickweeds, and henbit.
- Schedule irrigation in the morning so that plant and soil surfaces dry quickly.

Endura (active ingredient boscalid) is the only fungicide for white mold that is registered on vegetable brassica crops. At \$36 per acre, it is relatively expensive. Endura may be applied only twice per crop.

It is not known how much effect Endura would have on plants already infected; this type of application is not recommended. Growers who have had problems with white mold in the recent past and plan to harvest overwintered cole crops should apply Endura once as a preventative.

SC Fruit, Vegetable, & Specialty Crop Association  
% SC Department of Agriculture  
PO Box 11280  
Columbia, SC 29211

### ***Mark your calendar! Upcoming Events***

#### **January 14, 2008**

*Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Group Public Forum*  
Sandhill Research and Education Center  
Contact: Geoff Zehnder, 864-656-6644, zehnder@clemson.edu

#### **January 31, 2008**

*Membership Dues Deadline.*

#### **May 6, 2008**

*Vegetable Production Field Day*  
Coastal Research and Education Center  
Contact: Roger Francis, 843-722-594, rfrncs@clemson.edu

#### **January - February 2008**

*Pest Management Training for Organic Vegetable Production*  
Three-week course: 1 class per week  
Training open to growers transitioning from conventional farming to organic farming.  
Contact: Roger Francis, 843-722-5940, rfrncs@clemson.edu

#### **February 1, 2008**

*Notification to farmers about the requirements for participating in the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition, the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition, and the EBT Cards Programs at the farmers markets.*  
Contact: Fred Broughton, 803-734-2200, fbrough@scda.sc.gov

#### **February 26, 2008**

*SCDA Community based Farmers Market Managers Training*  
Contact: Fred Broughton, 803-734-2200, fbrough@scda.sc.gov

### ***Membership Renewal Deadline!*** ***January 31, 2008***

**Three reasons to renew your membership to the SC Fruit, Vegetable & Specialty Crop Association . . .**

- 1. The Association works with the SC Department of Agriculture to identify marketing opportunities for all farmers that grow produce in SC.**
- 2. The Association works with researchers to identify and prioritize research that is needed on production and harvesting of produce in SC.**
- 3. The Association cooperates with other agricultural associations and organizations in SC to make a financial commitment to promote Certified SC Grown on your behalf.**

**Complete the membership application and mail it with a check payable SC-FV&SC Association to the address on the form by January 31, 2008.**

**If you did not receive a membership form by mail, contact Fred Broughton, 803-734-2200, fbrough@scda.sc.gov.**